United Nations

Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

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Letter of transmittal

15 November 1999

Mr. Secretary-General,

As humankind approaches the dawn of the new millennium, the Palestinian people is yet to fulfil its aspirations for the exercise of its inalienable rights — the rights it has been denied for over five decades. The Palestinian people has now reached a crucial point in its history, at which decisions and transformations of historic consequence for the future of the entire region of the Middle East will be made. Since its inception in 1975, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People has striven to support the Palestinian people in the quest for the realization of its inalienable rights, namely, the right to self-determination without external interference; the right to national independence and sovereignty; and the right to return to their homes and property from which they had been displaced. The Committee will continue to provide the necessary support to the Palestinian people until those rights are realized.

The Committee commends your efforts at supporting the Middle East peace process and at bringing about a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, providing the varied economic assistance to the Palestinian people, carrying out the difficult task of rehabilitating the Palestinian economy, as well as making the socio-economic development of the Palestinian society viable and sustainable. The Committee is confident that the United Nations will continue to support the Palestinian people, helping it advance steadily towards statehood and economic recovery.

In the hope that our work will make a constructive contribution to the deliberations of the General Assembly, I have the honour to enclose herewith the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for submission to the General Assembly in accordance with paragraph 5 of its resolution 53/39 of 2 December 1998. The report covers the period from 4 November 1998 to 12 November 1999.

Accept, Sir, the assurances of my highest consideration.

(*Signed*) Ibra Deguène **Ka**
Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights
of the Palestinian People

Chapter I
Introduction

1. The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People was established by the General Assembly in its resolution 3376 (XXX) of 10 November 1975, with the task of recommending a programme designed to enable the Palestinian people to exercise its inalienable rights as recognized by the Assembly in its resolution 3236 (XXIX) of 22 November 1974.

2. The recommendations made by the Committee in its first report to the General Assembly[1] were endorsed by the Assembly as a basis for the solution to the question of Palestine. In its subsequent reports,[2] the Committee has continued to stress that a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine, the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, must be based on the relevant United Nations resolutions and the following essential principles: the withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem, and from the other occupied Arab territories; respect for the right of all States in the region to live in peace within secure and internationally recognized boundaries; and the recognition and exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, primarily the right to self-determination. The Committee's recommendations could not be implemented and the Assembly each year renewed the Committee's mandate and requested it to intensify efforts in pursuit of its objectives.

3. The Committee welcomed the historic breakthrough in the peace process in 1993 and the subsequent important steps towards the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). At the same time, the Committee continued to work towards the full realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to self-determination and to its own independent State and to mobilize the needed international assistance and solidarity during the transitional period.

4. Having welcomed, in October 1998, the signing of the Wye River Memorandum, the Committee expressed concern at the subsequent freezing of its implementation by the Israeli Government, which resulted in a prolonged stalemate in the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations. Following the May 1999 elections in Israel, the Committee was hopeful that the new Israeli Government would be in a position to bring about positive changes in the peace process, as well as on the ground. In this regard, the Committee took note of the stated intent of the Israeli side, as stipulated in the Basic Guidelines of the Government of Israel of 6 July 1999, to honour and implement the agreements signed with the Palestinians. The Committee was of the view that the resumption in August 1999 of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, the signing on 4 September 1999 of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum, the implementation of the first phase of Israel's further redeployment from the West Bank and the start of the permanent status negotiations were positive and encouraging developments. The Committee also took note of the agreed commitment by the parties to conclude a framework agreement within five months from the resumption of the permanent status negotiations and a comprehensive agreement on all permanent status issues within one year, that is, in September 2000. The Committee expressed the hope that those important negotiations would progress in the spirit of trust and understanding between the parties and would bring tangible results. The Committee, however, reiterated its position of principle that the policies and practices of occupation currently in place are in violation of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949 (the Fourth Geneva Convention),[3] and Security Council resolutions, pose a serious threat to the peace process and can destabilize the situation on the ground.

5. The Committee strongly supported all international endeavours aimed at bringing about a speedy resumption of the peace process and a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine. For its part, the Committee, as the organ of the General Assembly entrusted to deal with the question of Palestine, has participated in the various international initiatives in this regard. It intends to continue to do so until the question of Palestine is resolved in all aspects and the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people are fully realized.

Chapter II
Mandate of the Committee

6. The mandate of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People was again renewed by the General Assembly in its resolution 53/39 of 2 December 1998, in which the Assembly (a) endorsed the Conclusions and Recommendations of the Committee[4] and requested it to continue to keep under review the situation relating to the question of Palestine and to report and make suggestions to the Assembly or the Security Council, as appropriate; (b) authorized the Committee to continue to exert all efforts to promote the exercise of the inalienable

rights of the Palestinian people and to report thereon to the Assembly at its fifty-fourth session and thereafter; and (c) requested the Committee to continue to extend its cooperation and support to Palestinian and other non-governmental organizations in order to mobilize international solidarity with and support for the achievement by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights and for a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine.

7. In its resolution 53/40 of 2 December 1998, on the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to continue to provide the Division with the necessary resources and to ensure that it continues to carry out its programme of work as detailed in the relevant earlier resolutions, including, in particular, the organization of meetings in various regions with the participation of all sectors of the international community, the further development and expansion of the documents collection of the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine, the preparation and widest possible dissemination of publications and information materials on various aspects of the question of Palestine, the provision of assistance in completing the project on the modernization of the records of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine and the provision of the annual training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority.

8. In its resolution 53/41 of 2 December 1998, on the special information programme on the question of Palestine, the General Assembly requested the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat, in full cooperation and coordination with the Committee, to continue, with the necessary flexibility as may be required by developments affecting the question of Palestine, its special information programme for the biennium 1998-1999.

9. In carrying out its programme of work, the Committee also took into account General Assembly resolution 53/42 of 2 December 1998, in which the Assembly reaffirmed the necessity of achieving a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine in all its aspects, expressed its full support for the ongoing peace process, and stressed the need for the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, primarily the right to self-determination; the need for the withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967; and the need for resolving the problem of the Palestine refugees.

Chapter III
Organization of work

A. Membership and officers

10. The Committee is composed of the following Member States: Afghanistan, Belarus, Cuba, Cyprus, Guinea, Guyana, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mali, Malta, Namibia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Romania, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine and Yugoslavia.[5]

11. At its 243rd meeting, on 9 February 1999, the Committee re-elected Ibra Deguène Ka (Senegal) as Chairman and re-elected Ravan A. G. Farhâdi (Afghanistan) and Bruno Eduardo Rodríguez Parrilla (Cuba) as Vice-Chairmen and George Saliba (Malta) as Rapporteur. At its 246th meeting, on 11 August 1999, the Committee elected Walter Balzan (Malta) as its Rapporteur, replacing George Saliba, former Rapporteur of the Committee, who had been assigned by his Government to another post.

12. At its 243rd meeting, the Committee adopted the programme of work for 1999.[6]

B. Participation in the work of the Committee

13. As in previous years, the Committee reconfirmed that all States Members of and permanent observers to the United Nations desiring to participate in the work of the Committee as observers were welcome to do so. In accordance with established practice, the Permanent Observer of Palestine participated in the work of the Committee as an observer, attended all its meetings and made observations and proposals for consideration by the Committee and its Bureau.

14. On 17 November 1998, the Government of Yemen, in a note verbale addressed to the Chairman of the Committee, informed him of its decision to take part in the work of the Committee as an observer. The Committee welcomed the decision of the Government of Yemen and approved the request at its 243rd meeting, on 9 February 1999.

15. In 1999, the Committee again welcomed as observers all the States and organizations that had participated in its work in the preceding year.[7]

Chapter IV
Review of the situation relating to the question of Palestine

16. The Committee continued to follow closely the developments in the peace process. It expressed much concern at the breakdown of the peace process following the freezing of the implementation of the Wye River Memorandum. In that regard, the Committee emphasized the importance of respect for, as well as the full and timely implementation of all the Israeli-Palestinian agreements. The Committee expressed its regret that, for the greater part of 1999, the peace process had remained stalled owing to the position taken by the Government of Israel. During that period, the Israeli authorities had continued to pursue the policy of creating illegal "facts on the ground", effectively undermining the peace process and pre-empting the outcome of the permanent status negotiations.

17. At the same time, the Committee was encouraged by a series of important developments that had a positive impact on the peace process. The Committee viewed the visit by the United States President Bill Clinton to Gaza and Bethlehem from 14 to 16 December 1998 and the important statements made by him in the course of the visit as a positive step aimed at restarting the peace process. The Committee took note with satisfaction of the statement on the Middle East peace process made by the Council of the European Union at its session on 24 and 25 March 1999 and its reaffirmation of the continuing and unqualified Palestinian right to self-determination, including the option of a State. The Committee also noted the important decisions in that regard made by the Palestinian Central Council at its extraordinary session held in Gaza from 27 to 29 April 1999 and expressed full support for the position taken by the Palestinian political leadership on the issue of Palestinian statehood (see para. 35).

18. The Committee was hopeful that the new Government of Israel would honour its obligations vis-à-vis the Palestinian side under the Wye River Memorandum, restore the spirit of confidence between the two parties, vital to the success of the peace process, re-engage in the peace negotiations fully and without preconditions and move forward towards the sensitive stage of the permanent status negotiations. In that connection, it welcomed the resumption in August 1999 of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations followed by the signing on 4 September of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum on Implementation Timeline of Outstanding Commitments of Agreements Signed and the Resumption of Permanent Status Negotiations. The Memorandum provided, *inter alia*, for resumption of the permanent status negotiations; further phased Israeli redeployment from the West Bank; phased release of Palestinian prisoners; agreement on the safe passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip; beginning of the construction work on the Gaza sea port; agreement on some issues relating to the city of Hebron; and agreement on security-related issues. The Committee noted with satisfaction the beginning of the implementation of the Memorandum in September 1999 and hoped that it would be completed in good faith and in strict compliance with the agreed timetable. The Committee also welcomed the signing of the Memorandum as it enabled the parties to restart, on 13 September 1999, their negotiations on the permanent status issues. It was hopeful that the parties would be able to conclude a framework agreement within five months from the resumption of the permanent status negotiations, followed by a comprehensive agreement on all permanent status issues within one year.

19. The Committee supported the convening on 15 July 1999 at the United Nations Office at Geneva of the Conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention on Measures to Enforce the Convention in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem, as recommended by the General Assembly at its tenth emergency special session in its resolution ES-10/6. In that regard, the Committee noted the significance of the Conference as it convened to consider for the first time a specific case of violations of the Fourth Geneva Convention. The Committee also took note of the statement adopted at the conclusion of the Conference. The participating High Contracting Parties reaffirmed the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. The Conference adjourned on the understanding that it would convene again in the light of consultations on the development of the humanitarian situation in the field.

20. In the year under review, the Committee continued to follow closely the situation on the ground, including the illegal settlement activities carried out by the Israeli authorities. In disregard of the position of the international community, the construction of new and expansion of the existing settlements in the various parts of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem, continued. Moreover, the outgoing Israeli Government made a determined effort to accelerate that process. The year witnessed an unhindered continuation by the Israeli authorities of their settlement activities. During the year, the Israeli authorities made public their plans for further expansion of the settlement work. The Knesset Finance

Committee, on 16 December 1998, approved US$ 6.5 million for settlement housing and infrastructure construction. On 10 May 1999, the same Committee allocated another US$ 3 million for infrastructure work in 32 settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, beyond the borders of existing settlements. According to Israeli press reports, more than 20 per cent of all land slated by Israel's Ministry of Construction and Housing for marketing in 1999 was located in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. On 5 February 1999, the Israeli Government approved its 1999 budget, adding US$ 38 million for settlement construction in spite of repeated appeals by the international community to halt settlement activity. Actual settlement construction continued at an accelerated pace in the various parts of the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Settlements selected for such sales included "Ariel", "Alfe Menashe", "Emmanuel", "Betar", "Efrat", "Maaleh Adumim", "Givat Ze'ev", "Adam" and "Har Homa". In February, tenders were published for the construction of housing in the settlement of "Efrat", south, and "Betar Ilit" west of Bethlehem, as well as in "Ofarim", north-west of Ramallah. On 12 April 1999, a new construction was reported near the settlement of "Brakha", south of Nablus. In May, the Government approved a plan to enlarge the area of the settlement of "Maaleh Adumim", east of Jerusalem, by over 1,300 hectares (3,250 acres), forming a continuous strip of settlements and virtually cutting the West Bank in half. In June 1999, settlers of "Ariel", south of Nablus, obtained permission to build 1,000 new housing units. It was estimated that, once completed, the new units would increase the number of settler households in the settlement by 25 per cent. Also in June, "Neveh Dekalim" settlers confiscated land near Khan Younis and built a new settlement of "Tal Katif". In the course of the year, tenders were invited by the Government or published in the press for the construction of additional housing in a number of West Bank and Gaza Strip settlements. In spite of the stated position of the new Israeli Government not to build new settlements, Israel's Ministry of Construction and Housing has since July 1999 reportedly issued tenders for the illegal construction of 2,594 new residential units slated for settlements around Jerusalem, namely "Maaleh Adumim", "Givat Ze'ev", "Betar Ilit" and "Har Adar".

21. Another disturbing feature of the settlement drive of the past year has been the "grab and settle" policy targeting hilltops in the various parts of the West Bank, as well as the continued acceleration of the construction of bypass roads to service the settlements. Since mid-November 1998, following calls from Israeli government ministers to "grab hilltops", settler attempts to occupy hilltops throughout the West Bank have become increasingly frequent. Some 42 new hilltop settlements have been established since the signing of the Wye River Memorandum. The Committee noted the decision of the Israeli Government to evacuate some of the settlements stating that they had been set up "illegally". In that connection, the Committee wishes to reiterate its position of principle that all the Israeli settlements on Palestinian land are illegal and should be dismantled.

22. Settlement activity continued in and around East Jerusalem. It was reported on 24 January 1999 that a 30,000 sq m commercial/residential development plan had been approved for the settlement of "Ramot". Israel continued to challenge and violate the internationally recognized status of Jerusalem. In a communiqué issued on 14 March 1999, the Israeli Cabinet challenged the legal status of the city, by stating that Jerusalem's position as a *corpus separatum* was legally incorrect and unacceptable to Israel. It declared further that Israel would never accept the "division or internationalization" of the city. In order to attract settlers to the city, the Israeli authorities on 9 May 1999 offered US$ 5,000 to any Israeli willing to settle in "new neighbourhoods" of East Jerusalem. The authorities also agreed to a four-year plan to develop their infrastructure. The Committee was particularly alarmed by the beginning of the actual construction work on 16 May 1999 at Jabal Abu Ghneim, south of East Jerusalem and, two days later, at the Ras al-Amud neighbourhood.

23. The Committee stressed the illegality of the continued Israeli policy of "silent transfer" of Palestinians from East Jerusalem. During the year, Palestinian residence rights remained in jeopardy. In the first four months of 1999, 127 identity cards were confiscated from Palestinian Jerusalemites.

24. The Committee also noted with great concern the provocative activities of extremist settlers and settler groups. In the course of the year, the settlers continued attempts to occupy Palestinian land and property, harass Palestinian civilians and often engage in violent confrontations with them. On 8 January 1999, a militia composed of right-wing settlers was created for the purpose of assisting settlers in the Nablus and Hebron areas in their conflicts with the Palestinian population. On 8 June 1999, members of the "El Ad" settler organization occupied four buildings purchased earlier in the Silwan neighbourhood of East Jerusalem. For the first time since 1967, a civilian guard was established on 11 June 1999 in the West Bank settlements, intended to operate independently from the Israeli police or Israel Defence Forces (IDF).

25. The Committee expressed concern that Israel continued to detain some 2,000 Palestinians. Reports available to the Committee indicated that many Palestinian

prisoners were suffering from various kinds of illness. Some had serious heart or kidney conditions. The Committee noted the release, in September and October, of 350 prisoners, in accordance with the provisions of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum. However, having noted a delay in the implementation of the second stage of the prisoner release, the Committee expressed the hope that the remaining stage of the release would be implemented on time and in full compliance with the Memorandum. Concerned about the conditions of detention of Palestinian prisoners and reports of harsh interrogation methods and torture used by Israel's General Security Service (GSS), the Committee called once again upon the Government of Israel to respect and abide by the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention. The Committee noted with satisfaction the decision adopted by Israel's High Court of Justice in September 1999 stipulating that the GSS was not authorized to employ certain investigation and interrogation methods that involved the use of physical pressure against detainees.

26. Although the Palestinian economy showed signs of a slight growth in real terms in the past year, the Committee noted that it continued to suffer from structural imbalance as a result of the occupation and over-reliance on the Israeli economy. The restrictions on the movement of goods and labour force between the West Bank and East Jerusalem and between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip imposed by the Israeli authorities and the protracted lack of agreement on the safe passage routes had a negative impact on the livelihood of the Palestinian economy. The economic situation in the Gaza Strip, in particular, remained a cause of great concern.

27. During the year under review, the Committee observed with increasing concern that the water supply situation was precarious, stifling the prospects of economic development of the Palestinian population. During the summer drought of 1999, some 200,000 Palestinians suffered from severe water shortages. Also, there remained a long-standing disparity in the water consumption between the Israelis and the Palestinians. On average, the Israelis used some 53 gallons of water per person a day, while the Palestinians used 18.5 gallons. In the densely populated Gaza Strip the water situation was particularly dire, at times forcing the population to consume water polluted by the nearby eastern Mediterranean. Palestinians in about 180 unconnected West Bank villages, with a population comprising approximately 20 per cent of the Palestinian population of the West Bank, were most detrimentally affected by the water shortage. By contrast, Israeli settlements had free access to water supplies. Reports indicated that the IDF regularly trucked in water to some of the settlements. As a result of the discriminatory and illegal Israeli water-management practices, the Palestinian population remained deprived of the right to its water resources. In that context, the Committee welcomed the assistance by some donor countries in providing Palestinian towns and villages with water-supply facilities.

28. The Committee expressed appreciation to the international community for its continued economic assistance to the Palestinian people in the various fields. The Committee viewed this much-needed assistance by the United Nations system and by the donor community as an important form of support for and underpinning of the peace process. It also considered it to be a crucial contribution to the development of a sustainable Palestinian economy and to the Palestinian institution- and nation-building. In that regard, the Committee called upon the international donor community to step up its assistance to the Palestinian people and expressed the hope that the contributions pledged towards the development of the Palestinian economy would be disbursed in full and as a matter of highest priority. The Committee welcomed the determination of the donors to assist the Palestinian people in its economic development. It noted the signing at an Ad Hoc Liaison Committee meeting, in Tokyo, on 15 October, of a tripartite action plan aimed at assisting the peace process and accelerating the disbursement of commitments in order to expedite implementation of essential development projects without delay. The Committee took note of the appointment on 21 September 1999 of Terje Rød-Larsen as the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority and expressed the hope that he would continue to serve as a focal point for the various forms of United Nations assistance to the Palestinian people. The Committee also expressed appreciation for the efforts of the outgoing United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories, Chinmaya R. Gharekhan, to mobilize and coordinate the various forms of United Nations assistance to the Palestinian people.

29. In spite of the worsening financial constraints faced by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) during the year, the Committee noted the crucial role played by the Agency in assisting Palestine refugees through the provision of relief and social services. The Committee called upon all Governments, including non-contributing Governments, to contribute to the Agency's budget regularly in order to meet its anticipated needs and to intensify support for its activities. The Committee was of the view that any reduction

in the levels of financing of UNRWA would result in further exacerbation of the plight of the refugees. In view of this, the Committee firmly believed that the international community should continue to support the vital activities of UNRWA until the question of Palestine refugees was fully resolved in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions and international legitimacy. In that regard, the Committee was encouraged by the outcome of the donors' meeting held in Amman in September 1999, at which pledges of additional contributions to UNRWA were made by some donors.

Chapter V
Action taken by the Committee

A. Action taken in accordance with General Assembly resolution 53/39

30. In pursuance of its mandate and in response to the difficulties experienced by the peace process and diminishing prospects for a just and comprehensive settlement of the question of Palestine, the Committee stepped up its efforts to mobilize the international community in support of the Palestinian people, in cooperation with United Nations bodies, Governments, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and others, as indicated below.

1. Action in the General Assembly and communications to the President of the Security Council and the Secretary-General

(a) Resumed tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly

31. The Chairman and members of the Committee participated in the fourth resumption of the tenth emergency special session dealing with the illegal Israeli actions in Occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory. In pursuance of General Assembly resolution ES-10/5 of 17 March 1998, the emergency special session was resumed on 5 February 1999 at the request of the Permanent Representative of Jordan, in his capacity as Chairman of the Group of Arab States for the month of January 1999.

32. The Chairman of the Committee took part in the debate and made a statement in which he reviewed the situation on the ground, as well as in the peace process. He expressed support for and stressed the crucial importance of convening a conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention (A/ES-10/PV.10).

33. At the end of the debate, on 9 February 1999, the General Assembly, by a recorded vote of 115 to 2, with 5 abstentions, adopted resolution ES-10/6, in which it reiterated its condemnation of the failure of the Government of Israel to comply with the provisions of earlier resolutions; expressed grave concern at the adoption by the Knesset of the law of 26 January 1999 and the legislation of 27 January 1999, and reaffirmed that all legislative and administrative measures and actions taken by Israel, the occupying Power, which had altered or purported to alter the character, legal status and demographic composition of Occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, were all null and void and had no validity whatsoever; reiterated all the demands made of Israel, the occupying Power, in the earlier resolutions of the tenth emergency special session, including the immediate and full cessation of the construction at Jabal Abu Ghneim and of all other Israeli settlement activities, as well as of all illegal measures and actions in Occupied East Jerusalem, the acceptance of the *de jure* applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention and compliance with relevant Security Council resolutions, the cessation and reversal of all actions taken illegally against Palestinian Jerusalemites and the provision of information about goods produced or manufactured in the settlements; reiterated also its previous recommendations to Member States for the cessation of all forms of assistance and support for illegal Israeli activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem, in particular settlement activities and actively to discourage activities that directly contribute to any construction or development of those settlements; affirmed that increased efforts must be exerted to bring the peace process back on track and to continue the process towards the achievement of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the principle of land for peace, as well as Security Council resolution 425 (1978); recommended that the High Contracting Parties convene a conference on measures to enforce the Convention in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem, on 15 July 1999 at the United Nations Office at Geneva; invited the Government of Switzerland to undertake the necessary preparations prior to the conference; requested the Secretary-General to make the necessary facilities available to enable the High Contracting Parties to convene the conference; expressed its confidence that Palestine, as a party directly concerned, would participate in the conference; and decided to adjourn the tenth emergency special session temporarily and to

authorize the President of the most recent General Assembly to resume its meeting upon request from Member States.

(b) Communications to the President of the Security Council and the Secretary-General

34. In a letter dated 11 February 1999 addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/1999/151), the Chairman of the Committee reiterated the Committee's objection to the deletion from the list of items related to the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, the question of Palestine and the Middle East problem, which were of utmost concern not only to the Committee but also to the majority of Member States. He stated the Committee's belief that pending a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East, the core of which is the question of Palestine, in accordance with international legitimacy, those items should remain on the list of matters of which the Council is seized, as they continued to engage its responsibility with regard to the maintenance of international peace and security. He also stressed that any decision to delete those items, in the absence of positive developments in the peace process, would go well beyond procedural reform and would have far-reaching negative political implications.

35. In a letter dated 4 May 1999 to the Secretary-General (A/53/938-S/1999/512), the Chairman of the Committee informed the Secretary-General of the Committee's position concerning the series of meetings held in Gaza from 27 to 29 April 1999, within the framework of the extraordinary session of the Palestinian Central Council and of the final statement adopted at the conclusion of the session. He stated that the Committee expressed its full support for the decisions of the Palestinian political leadership and that it was hopeful that the Council's statement would lead to the revitalization of the currently deadlocked peace process. In the Committee's view, that constructive diplomatic initiative should enable the parties to re-engage in the critical phase of the permanent status negotiations on the most sensitive and far-reaching political issues of great importance for both peoples and for the region as a whole. In view of this, the Committee wished to take the opportunity to call upon the Government of Israel to stop immediately its illegal policy and actions aimed at creating "facts on the ground", among other things, through establishing new and expanding existing settlements, stifling the Palestinian economic development and livelihood, and denying the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights. The Committee considered that the Israeli side should respond to the decisions of the Palestinian Central Council by returning to the negotiating table as soon as possible, without preconditions and in good faith, so as to allow the permanent status negotiations to proceed towards a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine. The Committee remains hopeful that the permanent status negotiations, once resumed by the parties, would be concluded within the agreed time-frame of approximately one year. The Committee also reiterated its position of principle in support of the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination and the establishment of a sovereign State.

2. Participation by the Chairman of the Committee at international conferences and meetings

36. During the year, the Chairman of the Committee participated in meetings of intergovernmental and other bodies and other meetings relevant to the question of Palestine and contributed to their deliberations in support of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, as follows:

(a) Twenty-sixth session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, Ouagadougou, 28 June-1 July 1999. The Chairman informed the Committee at its 246th meeting that the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers had adopted a communiqué calling on the international community to avoid dealings with Israel that might be interpreted as implicit recognition of the de facto situation imposed by Israel when it declared the city of Al-Quds as its capital, requesting its members who had established relations with Israel to reconsider such relations, and calling on the United Nations and other forums to force Israel to release detainees (see A/53/1044-S/1999/924);

(b) Seventieth ordinary session of the Council of Ministers and 35th ordinary session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), Algiers, 8-10 July and 12-14 July 1999, respectively (see A/54/424). In its decision on the question of Palestine, the OAU Council of Ministers reaffirmed the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including its right to declare a State; called upon Israel to halt immediately its confiscation of Palestinian land and expansion of settlements, especially in Jerusalem and its suburbs; called for an accurate implementation of all peace agreements; urged the sponsors of the peace process, the parties concerned and the entire international community to deploy all the required efforts to revive the peace process and ensure its success; hailed the decision of the Palestinian Authority to hold Bethlehem 2000 celebrations and called on all Member States to give those celebrations the attention they deserved, so as to ensure their success on the path to peace and hope in the Middle East;

(c) The meeting celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the Pontifical Mission for Palestine, United Nations Headquarters, 25 October 1999. The Chairman made a statement on behalf of the Committee in support of the work done in the Middle East, since 1949, by the Pontifical Mission for Palestine — an operating agency of the Catholic Near East Welfare Association. He expressed appreciation for the Mission's humanitarian assistance to Palestine refugees and others throughout the region. The Chairman also referred to specific activities of the Mission, including, among others, the medical assistance to children of the intifada, emergency relief to needy children in Lebanon, the rebuilding of Palestinian homes, the establishment of the Bethlehem University, the Ephpheta Institute for hearing-impaired children and the Notre Dame of Jerusalem pilgrimage centre.

37. As in previous years, the Committee followed with great interest the activities relevant to the question of Palestine of other intergovernmental organizations, as well as decisions and resolutions of United Nations bodies and agencies, notably the Economic and Social Council, the Commission on Human Rights, the Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities and the Committee against Torture, and the positive efforts made by many Governments. In that regard, the Committee noted the increasing concern of the international community over the lengthy stalemate in the peace process and welcomed its determination to continue efforts aimed at assisting the parties in bringing the negotiations back on track.

B. Action taken by the Committee and the Division for Palestinian Rights in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 53/39 and 53/40

38. In its programme of meetings organized in the various regions, the Committee continued to give priority to promoting the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, supporting the peace process and stressing the need for timely and scrupulous implementation by the parties of the bilateral agreements. The Committee also urged the international community to continue to provide political support, as well as broad economic assistance to the Palestinian people.

39. On the basis of the provision contained in General Assembly resolution 53/39, the Committee again adjusted this programme, as necessary, in order to meet the evolving situation in the most effective and constructive manner, while keeping in mind the continuing financial constraints facing the Organization. The Committee expressed its great appreciation to the Governments of Egypt, Italy and Namibia for having provided venues, facilities and financial support for the events sponsored by the Committee.

40. During the year, the Committee, through its Bureau, continued its cooperation on the question of Palestine with States members of the European Union. The Bureau held consultation meetings with representatives of the European Union (under the Presidencies of Germany and Finland) with a view to developing closer cooperation between the Committee and members of the Union. The Chairman of the Committee briefed the members of the EU delegation on the Committee's current and planned activities and expressed the hope that the Committee and EU would continue to hold consultations on issues of common interest. Both sides were in agreement on the need to continue the dialogue. In the course of the preparations for the Bethlehem 2000 International Conference (see paras. 43-48 below), the Bureau of the Committee developed a close and fruitful cooperation with the Government of Italy, which provided assistance in the organization of the Conference. The Committee expressed its gratitude to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Italy for its dedicated involvement in all aspects and all stages of the preparations for the Bethlehem 2000 International Conference. The Committee was also grateful for the financial contribution made by the Government of Italy towards the promotion of the Conference. The Committee expressed satisfaction at the way partnership had developed between the Committee and the Italian side in the course of the preparations for the Bethlehem 2000 International Conference and expressed the hope that that cooperation would continue.

41. The Bureau also met with the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs and discussed the situation on the ground and in the peace process, as well as the various aspects of the work of the Committee. The Bureau was of the view that such meetings were useful and constructive and should be held periodically in the future.

42. Throughout the year, the staff of the Division for Palestinian Rights met at Headquarters with members of the general public and student groups and briefed them on the various aspects of the question of Palestine and the involvement of the United Nations in the issue.

1. Bethlehem 2000 International Conference

43. The Bethlehem 2000 International Conference was held in Rome on 18 and 19 February 1999. The Conference was organized in response to General Assembly resolution

53/27 of 18 November 1998. It was attended by many high-level participants, including the Honourable Francesco Rutelli, Mayor of Rome; Sir Kieran Prendergast, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs and Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations; His Eminence Roger Cardinal Etchegaray, President of the Committee for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 and Head of the Holy See delegation; Mr. Jacques Baudin, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Senegal; Dr. Azeddine Laraki, Secretary-General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference; Ambassador Ibra Deguène Ka, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People; Mr. Jacques Diouf, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations; Mr. Lamberto Dini, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Italy. Among the eminent personalities who spoke at the Conference were the Honourable Luciano Violante, President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, and the Honourable Domenico Fisichella, Senator, Vice-President of the Italian Senate and Representative of the Honourable Nicola Mancino, President of the Italian Senate. The Chairman of the Executive Committee of the PLO and President of the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Yasser Arafat, attended the Conference and made an important statement.

44. A number of eminent personalities from various parts of the world, including representatives from different religious denominations, addressed the following themes: celebrating the new millennium in a global vision of peace and reconciliation, and preparing for the millennium celebrations.

45. During the Conference, the Committee delegation was received by H.E. Dr. Oscar Luigi Scalfaro, President of the Italian Republic, who expressed the readiness of his country to continue to make every effort aimed at bringing the peace process back on track. The Committee delegation was also received by His Holiness Pope John Paul II, who expressed confidence that peace was possible in the Middle East and that the promise of peace would become a reality when the dignity and the rights of human beings, made in the image of God, were acknowledged and respected. His Holiness welcomed the Committee's endeavours and sent his blessings for the success of the coming celebrations in Bethlehem.

46. In preparation for the Conference and with the financial assistance from the Government of Italy, the Division for Palestinian Rights, in cooperation with the Palestinian Authority, produced a background note on the United Nations involvement in the Bethlehem 2000 Project, entitled "The United Nations and Bethlehem 2000".

47. At the conclusion of the Conference, the participants adopted the Rome Declaration, in which they promoted the Bethlehem 2000 Project launched by the Palestinian Authority and highlighted the urgency of bringing economic recovery and prosperity to the Palestinian people. They welcomed the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 53/27 and considered it a clear reflection of the world community's strong desire to bring the era of dialogue, tolerance and reconciliation to the people of Bethlehem and the entire Middle East. The participants also expressed the view that freedom of movement and unhindered access to the Holy Places in Bethlehem by the faithful of all religions and nationalities were essential to the city's revival.

48. A comprehensive report containing the proceedings of the Conference was issued as a publication of the Division for Palestinian Rights.

2. United Nations African Meeting in Support of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

49. The United Nations African Meeting in Support of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People was held at Windhoek from 20 to 22 April 1999. The participants included eminent political personalities from Africa, a representative of the Secretary-General, representatives of Governments, intergovernmental organizations, United Nations system organizations and agencies, the Palestinian Authority, parliamentarians, non-governmental organizations and representatives of the media.

50. The participants discussed the following issues: promoting the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people — a key to peace in the Middle East; the role of Africa in supporting the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people; and celebrating the new millennium in a global vision of peace and reconciliation — the Bethlehem 2000 Project of the Palestinian Authority.

51. In the Windhoek Declaration, the final document of the Meeting, the participants focused on the role of African States in supporting the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people as well as the international community's action in promoting the Bethlehem 2000 Project. It was also emphasized that the establishment of a Palestinian State remained a key element for the successful settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the core of which is the question of Palestine. The participants discussed the experience of African States in the struggle for decolonization, independence and sovereignty, as well as the experience of Africa in the quest for economic independence and sustainable development. Prospects for the promotion of

bilateral economic cooperation and trade, as well as the establishment of business partnerships with the Palestinian counterparts, were also discussed.

52. The Committee delegation was received by H.E. Dr. Sam Nujoma, President of the Republic of Namibia, who welcomed the efforts of the Committee aimed at bringing about a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement on the question of Palestine. The delegation was also received by The Right Honourable Hage Geingob, Prime Minister of Namibia, who expressed his country's strong support for the work of the Committee.

53. The report of the Meeting was issued as a publication of the Division for Palestinian Rights.

3. United Nations International Meeting on the Convening of the Conference on Measures to Enforce the Fourth Geneva Convention in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem

54. The United Nations International Meeting on the Convening of the Conference on Measures to Enforce the Fourth Geneva Convention in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem, was held in Cairo on 14 and 15 June 1999. The Meeting was attended by international legal experts, as well as by a representative of the Secretary-General, representatives of Governments, intergovernmental organizations, United Nations system organizations and agencies, a representative of the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Palestinian Authority, non-governmental organizations and representatives of the media.

55. The following topics were discussed by the participants: violations by Israel, the occupying Power, of the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention; the enforcement of the Convention; and the Conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Convention and its possible outcomes.

56. In their final statement at the close of the Meeting, the participants stressed the universal character of the Geneva Conventions and the fact that their provisions had been accepted as norms of international customary law. They expressed serious concern with regard to grave breaches and violations by Israel, the occupying Power, of the Fourth Geneva Convention. They expressed their utmost concern at the continuing settlement activities, which included land confiscation and transfer of Israeli civilians to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem, in clear violation of article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. They strongly supported the convening by the High Contracting Parties of the conference on measures to enforce the Convention, on 15 July 1999, at the United Nations Office at Geneva.

57. The report of the Meeting will be issued as a publication of the Division for Palestinian Rights.

4. Visit of the Committee delegation to Gaza

58. Following the Meeting in Cairo, the Committee delegation visited Gaza from 16 to 18 June 1999. During that visit, the first for the Committee, the delegation was received by the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority, Yasser Arafat. The Committee also had the opportunity to meet with high-ranking Palestinian officials, including Palestinian Authority Ministers, the Mayor of Gaza City, the District Governor, as well as the United Nations Special Coordinator of the Occupied Territory and representatives of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

59. The Chairman of the Committee briefed Mr. Arafat on the various activities of the Committee, including the outcome of the Meeting in Cairo. Mr. Arafat and the Chairman exchanged views on the latest developments in the peace process, the continuing difficulties faced by the Palestinian people and the need for international action in support of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

60. While in Gaza, the Committee delegation visited a number of UNDP projects in Gaza City, the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation and the Palestine Red Crescent Community Centre, near the Khan Younis refugee camp.

5. Cooperation with non-governmental organizations

61. The Committee noted the important role played by non-governmental organizations in mobilizing international solidarity with the Palestinian people and support for the achievement of its inalienable rights. With a view to developing the most effective means of cooperation with organizations on the question of Palestine, the Committee has restructured its non-governmental organizations programme, including its programme of meetings. The Committee held consultations with representatives of organizations in Rome, in February 1999, during the Bethlehem 2000 International Conference. Another consultation meeting is scheduled to take place in November 1999 at Headquarters. In the course of the year, representatives of non-governmental organizations have

participated in all the international conferences and meetings organized under the auspices of the Committee. A large number of organizations participated actively in those meetings and showed particular interest in supporting the Bethlehem 2000 Project of the Palestinian Authority, as well as discussing issues relating to the enforcement of the Fourth Geneva Convention in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem.

62. In response to the Committee's request to the Division for Palestinian Rights to develop new and more flexible ways of cooperating and communicating with non-governmental organizations, an Internet Web site, entitled "NGO Network on the Question of Palestine", was launched in September 1999. It is maintained by the Division and is part of a Web site on the United Nations cooperation with civil society organizations established on the United Nations home page. This Web site can be found at: <http://www.un.org/depts/dpa/ngo>.

63. The staff of the Division participated in meetings organized by civil society organizations in Murcia, Spain, and Athens.

64. During the year, the Division continued to issue its periodic newsletter entitled *NGO Action News* covering the activities of non-governmental organizations on the various aspects of the question of Palestine.

6. Research, monitoring and publications

65. The Committee continued to attach great importance to the essential contribution of the Division for Palestinian Rights and requested it to continue its established programme of work, including studies and publications; the further development of the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine; the annual training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority; and the annual observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

66. Accordingly, the Division continued to respond to requests for information and to prepare and disseminate to its worldwide network the following publications:

(a) Monthly bulletin covering action by the Committee, United Nations bodies and agencies, and intergovernmental organizations concerned with the question of Palestine;

(b) Periodic bulletin entitled "Developments related to the Middle East peace process";

(c) Monthly chronology of events relating to the question of Palestine, based on media reports and other sources;

(d) Reports of meetings organized under the auspices of the Committee;

(e) Special bulletin on the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People; and

(f) Annual compilation of relevant resolutions, decisions and statements of the General Assembly and the Security Council relating to the question of Palestine.

67. The Committee expressed the wish that the Division continue to work on a draft study on Israeli settlements and on updating its information notes.

7. United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine

68. The Division for Palestinian Rights, in cooperation with relevant technical services of the United Nations Secretariat, continued to develop UNISPAL, as mandated by the General Assembly in 1991. This included a further upgrading of its hardware and software components, the scanning and inclusion into the system of several hundreds of new and old documents, improvement of a database relating to non-governmental organizations, improvement of quality control and the further development and improvement of access to the UNISPAL, as well as question of Palestine sites on the Internet.

69. The staff of the Division coordinated and supervised the electronic conversion of the records of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine, in pursuance of the mandate given by the General Assembly in its resolution 51/129 of 13 December 1996 and the understanding reached with regard to the redeployment of funds from savings achieved in carrying out the programme of work of the Committee. The conversion of those records was further expanded to include additional related documentation.

8. Training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority

70. Two staff members from the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation of the Palestinian Authority participated in a training programme conducted by the Division, from September to December 1998, in conjunction with the fifty-third session of the General Assembly. They familiarized themselves with various aspects of the work of the Secretariat and other organs. The programme included, among other things, attendance at various briefings and meetings of relevant committees and bodies of the United Nations, meetings with representatives of delegations to the General Assembly and members of staff of permanent

missions to the United Nations. The trainees also conducted research on specific topics of interest to them.

9. International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

71. The International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People was observed on 30 November 1998 at United Nations Headquarters and at the United Nations Offices at Geneva and Vienna. On the occasion of the observance at Headquarters, in addition to a solemn meeting of the Committee and other activities, an exhibit entitled "Bethlehem 2000" was presented by the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine, under the auspices of the Committee. The Committee noted with appreciation that the International Day of Solidarity had also been observed in many other cities throughout the world. Details on the observance are contained in the special bulletin issued by the Division.

72. In adopting its programme of work, the Committee decided that a similar event would be organized in connection with the observance of the Day in 1999.

C. Action taken in accordance with General Assembly resolution 53/27

73. In pursuance of General Assembly resolution 53/27 of 18 November 1998 and in response to the overwhelming support the resolution had received during the fifty-third session of the Assembly, the Committee has throughout the year attached the greatest importance to the need to support and promote the Bethlehem 2000 Project of the Palestinian Authority. The Committee devoted a considerable part of its programme of activities to that issue.

74. In a letter dated 28 September 1999 to the Secretary-General, the Chairman of the Committee outlined the action taken by the Committee with respect to Bethlehem 2000, including the convening of the Bethlehem 2000 International Conference in Rome; the promotion of the Bethlehem 2000 Project at other meetings organized under the auspices of the Committee; the promotion of the Project at meetings with representatives of intergovernmental organizations, namely, EU, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the League of Arab States; the role played by UNDP, the World Bank and UNESCO in providing assistance in connection with the Project; the preparation and display at United Nations Headquarters, as well as in Rome and Windhoek, of the Palestinian exhibit, comprising works of art and photography from Bethlehem; and the publication, in cooperation with the Palestinian Authority, of a background note entitled "The United Nations and Bethlehem 2000" (A/54/416).

Chapter VI
Action taken by the Department of Public Information in accordance with General Assembly resolution 53/41

75. In pursuance of General Assembly resolution 53/41 of 2 December 1998, the Department of Public Information continued its special information programme on the question of Palestine, which included among its highlights the convening of an international encounter on the theme "Prospects for Peace" and the organization of a training programme for Palestinian broadcasters and journalists.

76. In cooperation with the Government of Spain, the Department convened an international encounter in Madrid on 23 and 24 March 1999. Panellists included distinguished officials and analysts from the Palestinian Authority, the Palestine Liberation Organization, Israel, neighbouring countries, Europe and the United States of America, as well as the host country. Their presentations were followed by an exchange of views with the participants in the audience, which consisted of representatives of prominent media organizations from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the United States of America, as well as the Palestinian Authority and Israel. A large number of media organizations from the host country were also represented.

77. From 19 October to 20 November 1998, the Department organized a training programme at Headquarters for a group of nine Palestinian broadcasters and journalists in order to strengthen their professional capacity as information media personnel. From 25 October to 17 December 1998, the Department organized a training programme for seven additional Palestinian broadcasters and journalists. As was the case since the inception of the programme in 1995, the Department included in the planning of the programme elements such as workshops at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs in New York and at CNN in Atlanta, as well as briefings at international organizations and at institutions of the Government of the United States of America in Washington, D.C.

78. The Department provided press coverage, in English and French, of all meetings held at United Nations Headquarters, including those of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Coverage in English and French was also provided to the conferences and meetings held under the auspices of the Committee in Rome, Windhoek and Cairo. Press releases were issued on the texts of the statements by the Secretary-General.

79. From September 1998 to July 1999, the Dissemination and Communications Unit of the Department, in accordance with its established pattern, distributed 1,529 hard copies of documents and, through electronic mail, 43 titles of documents related to the question of Palestine.

80. The Public Inquiries Unit of the Department responded to 33 queries from the public on the question of Palestine.

81. The quarterly publication *UN Chronicle* has continued its coverage of issues related to the question of Palestine in the period from September 1998 to July 1999. Among articles published, one looked back on the establishment, 50 years earlier, of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) and another provided coverage of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. The Bethlehem 2000 Project to commemorate the new millennium in Bethlehem was also covered. Issue No.1, 1999, of the quarterly included a personal account of the early days of UNTSO by one of its original local staff members. The *UN Chronicle* provided regular coverage of peacekeeping operations in the Middle East.

82. The Radio and Central News Service of the Department covered extensively all aspects of the question of Palestine and related issues in daily news bulletins and current affairs radio programmes in various languages for regional and worldwide dissemination. During the reporting period, many interviews were conducted in Arabic with Palestinian representatives and journalists such as the Deputy Health Minister of the Palestinian Authority, the Deputy Observer of the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations and journalists who attended the 1998 DPI training programme for Palestinian broadcasters and journalists. Among the topics covered in the news bulletins and current affairs magazines were: the question of Palestine during the fifty-third session of the General Assembly; the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People; the Committee on Population and Development and the health situation in Palestine; the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory; the current status of the peace process and the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people; the Panel of Experts on Israeli Violations of the Fourth Geneva Convention; and the UNDP celebration of the twentieth anniversary of its assistance to the Palestinian people. In addition to short items in the news and current affairs magazines, the Service also produced 12 magazine and feature programmes devoted exclusively to the question of Palestine, including a four-part series entitled "UN assistance to the Palestinian People" in Arabic.

83. The Department cooperated with the Division for Palestinian Rights in the media promotion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People and provided assistance in organizing the special exhibit in connection with the observance, entitled "Bethlehem 2000". The observance of the Day presented special opportunities for cooperating with local non-governmental organizations in the organization of joint events and programmes to draw attention to the issue of Palestinian rights. Print and electronic media coverage of the event in most of the countries concerned was extensive. The Day was a major focus of the global network of United Nations information centres and information services. Special events were organized by the United Nations Information System in Beirut, and the United Nations Information Centres in Cairo, Dhaka, Harare, Islamabad, Lagos, Lisbon, Mexico City, Moscow, New Delhi, Ouagadougou, Pretoria, Sana'a, Bogotá and Tunis. Those activities included briefings, media campaigns, press conferences, interviews, lectures, seminars, television programmes and concerts. The United Nations Information Centre in Ouagadougou, together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Burkina Faso and the University of Ouagadougou, organized a lecture for an audience of 700. The Moscow United Nations Information Centre made arrangements for a round table on Palestine, co-sponsored by the League of Arab States. The Pretoria United Nations Information Centre's commemoration, organized jointly with the Government of South Africa, featured speeches, poetry citations, music and dance performances. At the United Nations Information Centre in Harare's Concert for Palestine, co-sponsored by the Zimbabwe-Palestine Solidarity Committee, Zimbabwean musicians paid tribute to the Palestinian people. Throughout the reporting period, the centres and services also continued to disseminate information on the question of Palestine and to organize special outreach activities relating to this issue. The Centre in Harare, together with the University of Zimbabwe, made arrangements for a special model United Nations session on the question of Palestine. That session, widely publicized beforehand, drew an audience of 600, including senior government officials and diplomats. The United Nations Information Centre in Athens hosted a special colloquium on the subject. A number of centres provided information and logistical support to visiting officials, as well as for conferences and seminars relating to the question of Palestine. The Centre in Rome lent its support to the Bethlehem 2000 International Conference. The Centre in Windhoek assisted in organizing broad media coverage of the United Nations African Meeting in Support of the

Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. The Centre in Madrid helped to organize and publicize the international encounter for journalists on the question of Palestine; and the Rio de Janeiro Centre assisted in the selection of a speaker for the same event. The United Nations Information Centre in Cairo provided support to the members of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories. The United Nations Information Centre in Washington coordinated the meetings of Mr. Gharekhan, United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories, with officials of the Government of the United States of America.

Chapter VII
Conclusions and recommendations of the Committee

84. The General Assembly, in its resolution 181 (II) of 29 November 1947, stipulates that independent Arab and Jewish States will come into existence in Palestine. After more than five decades of suffering and dispossession, as the world prepares to embrace the new millennium, the Palestinian people is yet to see that provision implemented and its aspirations for self-determination and statehood realized. Today, recent breakthroughs in the peace process notwithstanding, the Palestinian people still carries the heavy burden of occupation. Millions of Palestine refugees carry on with their lives in dismal and harsh conditions of refugee camps. A solution to the Palestine refugee question, in conformity with General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948, is yet to be achieved. Palestinians living under occupation are forced to grapple with the daily violation of their rights by the occupying Power and with the hostility of the settlers. The territory under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority now represents a disjointed multitude of enclaves surrounded by a dense net of settlements, restricting the freedom of movement of the Palestinians and severely affecting their livelihood. Over the years, this has had a damaging effect on the Palestinian economy and is likely to have an impact on the sustainability of the social and economic development of the Palestinian people, including its efforts at nation-building.

85. In the course of the year, the Committee has continued to reaffirm its strong support for the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations and has called upon the international community to help the parties rebuild the trust and confidence needed to move the peace process ahead towards the permanent status negotiations. In this connection, the Committee welcomed the resumption of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations on permanent status issues and expressed the hope that they would be conducted in compliance with the timetable agreed in the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum, signed on 4 September 1999. The Committee was encouraged by the commitment of the parties to conclude a framework agreement within five months from the resumption of the permanent status negotiations and a comprehensive agreement on all permanent status issues within one year. In that regard, the Committee wishes to emphasize that strong international consensus has emerged with respect to the need to reach the final settlement in the year 2000. The Committee also maintained that, at this crucial juncture, the international community, and in particular the co-sponsors of the peace process, should spare no effort in order to bring about a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, as well as peace and stability to the entire region.

86. The Committee is appalled by the fact that, as the parties engaged in the sensitive stage of the permanent status negotiations, the situation on the ground remained deplorable. In spite of some progress achieved in the negotiating process, the occupation of a vast Palestinian land area, the determination with which the occupying Power creates "facts on the ground" and violates the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people seriously jeopardizes and prejudges the outcome of the peace negotiations. It is, therefore, of paramount importance for the international community, including the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention, to do everything in their power to protect the Palestinian people until the parties reach a permanent status agreement and it is fully implemented.

87. In view of the above, the Committee reaffirms the permanent responsibility of the United Nations with respect to the question of Palestine until a satisfactory settlement, based on the relevant United Nations resolutions and international legitimacy, is reached and the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people are fully realized. As the parties embark on the sensitive stage of the permanent status negotiations, the role of the United Nations becomes even more critical. The Committee reiterates that the involvement of the United Nations in the peace process, both as the guardian of international legitimacy and in the mobilization and provision of international assistance for development, is essential for the successful outcome of the peace efforts. As the organ of the General Assembly established to deal with the question of Palestine, the Committee pledges to continue its work aimed at mobilizing the international community as a whole, at the governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental levels, in support

of a comprehensive, just and lasting solution of the question in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions.

88. The Committee is of the view that the adjustments made over the past year in the programme of meetings held in the various regions and in its cooperation with the non-governmental organization community made the programme more effective and focused. Moreover, it has played a useful role in heightening international awareness of the question of Palestine and in achieving wider recognition for the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights. The Committee will continue to review and assess that programme with a view to making it more effective and responsive to the evolving situation on the ground and in the peace process. In that regard, the Committee, in its programme of meetings for the next year, intends to focus on the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, Palestinian nation- and institution-building, socio-economic development and permanent status issues.

89. In pursuance of General Assembly resolution 53/27, the Committee, in the course of the year, placed special emphasis in its programme of activities on supporting and promoting the Bethlehem 2000 Project of the Palestinian Authority. The Committee intends to continue that important activity in order to ensure broad international support for the Project, as well as active international participation in the millennial celebrations in Bethlehem.

90. The Committee emphasizes the essential contribution of the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat in support of the Committee's objectives and requests it to continue its programme of publications and other activities, including the completion of its work on the UNISPAL collection and on the project for the modernization of the records of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine. The Committee also considers that the annual training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority has demonstrated its usefulness and requests that it be continued.

91. The Committee believes that the special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information has continued to be an important tool in informing the media and public opinion about issues relating to the question of Palestine, and requests that it be continued, with the necessary flexibility that may be required as a result of developments affecting the question of Palestine. The Committee wishes to reiterate its earlier requests that, as a matter of priority, the Department update the permanent photo exhibit on the question of Palestine for public display at Headquarters, update its publications on the various aspects of the question of Palestine and prepare audio-visual and other types of informational material for use by the general public.

92. In an effort to make its contribution to the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, the Committee calls on all States to join in this endeavour and invites the General Assembly again to recognize the importance of its role and to reconfirm its mandate with overwhelming support.

Notes

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-first Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/31/35).

[2] Ibid., *Thirty-second Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/32/35); ibid., *Thirty-third Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/33/35); ibid., *Thirty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/34/35 and Corr.1); ibid., *Thirty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/35/35); ibid., *Thirty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/36/35); ibid., *Thirty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/37/35 and Corr.1); ibid., *Thirty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/38/35); ibid., *Thirty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/39/35); ibid., *Fortieth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/40/35); ibid., *Forty-first Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/41/35); ibid., *Forty-second Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/42/35); ibid., *Forty-third Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/43/35); ibid., *Forty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/44/35); ibid., *Forty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/45/35); ibid., *Forty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/46/35); ibid., *Forty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/47/35); ibid., *Forty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/48/35); ibid., *Forty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/49/35); ibid., *Fiftieth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/50/35); ibid., *Fifty-first Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/51/35); ibid., *Fifty-second Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/52/35); and ibid., *Fifty-third Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/53/35).

[3] United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 75, No. 973.

[4] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-third Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/53/35), chap. VII.

[5] Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 47/1 of 22 September 1992, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia did not participate in the work of the Committee.

[6] A/AC.183/1999/CRP.1.

[7] The observers at the Committee meetings were as follows: Algeria, Bangladesh, Bulgaria, China, Ecuador, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Mauritania, Morocco, Nicaragua, Niger, Qatar, Sri Lanka, Syrian Arab Republic, United Arab Emirates, Viet Nam, League of Arab States, Organization of the Islamic Conference and Palestine.

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